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Oedipus of many pains: strategies of contest in the Homeric poems

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ABSTRACT: In this paper we analyse Oedipus' appearance during Odysseus' tale in book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey* in order to outline and test a methodology for appreciating the poetic and thematic implications of moments when 'extraneous' narratives or traditions appear in the Homeric poems. Our analysis, which draws on oral-formulaic theory, is offered partly as a re-evaluation of standard scholarly approaches that tend to over-rely on the assumed pre-eminence of Homeric narratives over other traditions in their original contexts or approaches that reduce such moments to instances of allusions to or parallels with fixed texts. In conjunction with perspectives grounded in orality, we emphasise the agonistic character of Greek poetry to explore the ways in which Odysseus' articulation of his Oedipus narrative exemplifies an attempt to appropriate and manipulate a rival tradition in the service of a particular narrative's ends. We focus specifically on the resonance of the phrases *algea polla* and *mega ergon* used by Odysseus as a narrator to draw a web of interconnections throughout Homeric and Archaic Greek poetry. Such an approach, in turn, suggests to what extent the Homeric Oedipus passage speaks to the themes and concerns of Homeric poetry rather than some lost Oedipal epic tradition and illustrates the importance of recognising the deeply competitive nature of Homeric narratives vis-à-vis other narrative traditions.

In book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus entertains his Phaeacian hosts by narrating his experiences in the underworld. After conversing with his mother—and before talking with the other heroes from Troy—he sees a parade of women, which he goes on to describe for his audience. It includes the mother of Oedipus, Epicaste (*Od.* 11.271-80):

μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδοιο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀϊδρεΐησι νόοιο
γημαμένη ᾧ νῦν· ὁ δ' ὃν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας
γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἤνασσε θεῶν ὀλοᾶς διὰ βουλᾶς·
ἣ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἴδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου
ᾧ ἄχει σχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσι.

And I saw the mother of Oedipus, fair Epicaste, who in the ignorance of her mind did a terrible thing by marrying her own son; he, after killing his own father, married her. The gods soon made it known among men. But while he continued to rule over the Cadmeans in much-loved Thebes, albeit suffering pains, through the god's baleful plans, she descended to the house of Hades with massive gates, lashing a noose to a steep rafter, there she hung aloft, subdued by

all her anguish. And she left her son to bear as many pains as a mother's Furies bring to fulfilment.

Odysseus offers a strikingly elliptical account of Oedipus' 'many pains' (ἄλγεα... πολλά), so much so that an ancient scholion glosses this passage by turning to Sophocles' canonical version of *Oedipus Tyrannos* to fill in the background to the story—thereby beginning a trend that continues to the present day.¹ The absence of characteristic details, such as Oedipus' blinding, children or exile, has led some critics to suppose that Homer did not know of these events.² Alternatively, others have regarded the Homeric account as the original version of the myth, from which later representations departed.³ Neither approach, however, focuses on what this story is doing in its context. While the Homeric poems are full of references to stories distinct from the narrative in which they are embedded, questions of priority, order and authority tend to be privileged, thereby obscuring the equally important investigation into *what* stories are told, *how* those should be understood, and *why* they are told *where* they are.

The Oedipus story is mentioned in only one other place in Homeric poetry, at *Il.* 23.679.⁴ Thebes itself is not much more popular, though Diomedes' heritage as the son of one of the original seven underpins his prominence in books five and six of the *Iliad*.⁵ Yet, there may once have existed a closer connection between

¹ See sch. V *Od.* 11.271 = sch. D (Ernst 2006).

² See Eust. *Comm. ad Homeri Od.* I 413.12-414.29 Stallbaum, where he remarks primarily on the material not included in Homer's account: citing the *Thebais* on several occasions he concludes that Homer does not mention things such as Oedipus' blinding because he did not know about it. Cf. Wyatt (1996-97) who suggests similarly that Oedipus' blinding was unknown to Homer and originated in a misreading of the account in the *Odyssey*.

³ E.g. Heubeck and Hoekstra (1989) 93-4: 'The description of Epicaste, wife of Laius, and mother of Oedipus, is the oldest identifiable version of the Oedipus legend, and contains all the central elements of the story.' Then they go on to talk about the self-blinding, children between the two, and voluntary exile—all famous from myth but absent from this version.

⁴ See Cingano (1992) for an attempt to harmonise the accounts of Hesiod (*Op.* 161-5), Homer (*Il.* 23.677-80) and Pherecydes regarding the death of Oedipus. Whereas Cingano is concerned with differences in accounts, our methodology would point to the relevance of the Homeric narrative introducing the reference to Oedipus' games as a feature of poetic rivalry. In the passage cited from the *Iliad*, note that Euryalus, whose father is said to have excelled in Oedipus' funeral games, receives a crushing blow from Epeius, a man who receives no externally relevant genealogy. Euryalus' line, then, ends in the *Iliad* as if the past represented by Oedipus' games is not up to the task of being compared to Patroclus'.

⁵ The Homeric epics refer to events set in and around Thebes through direct references to the city, references to its people, and invocation of heroes such as Tydeus or Heracles. For direct references to Thebes see *Il.* 1.366, 2.691, 4.378, 4.406, 5.804, 6.223, 6.397, 6.416, 10.286, 14.114, 14.323, 19.99, and 22.479; *Od.* 4.126, 11.263, 11.265, 11.275, and 15.247. For references to the *Kadmeioi*, see *Il.* 4.385, 4.388, 4.391, 5.807, 10.288, and 23.680; *Od.* 11.276. For references to Heracles (as a father or as the hero) see *Il.* 2.653, 2.658, 2.666, 2.679, 5.628, 5.638, 11.690, 14.266, 14.324, 15.25, 15.640, 18.117, 19.98, and 20.145; *Od.* 8.224, 11.267, 11.601, and 21.26. The agonistic quality of many of these references to Thebes can be gleaned from their contexts: in the *Iliad* Diomedes is positioned to rival his father Tydeus, while references to Heracles either underscore Zeus' power or implicitly denigrate his heroic prestige; in the *Odyssey* Heracles exists almost entirely in the speeches of Odysseus. The single exception occurs in book 21 in a digression on the bow of Odysseus. Embedded within this tale is a story of Heracles: he had no regard for the wrath of the gods or the table and killed a man who was looking to get his horses back (*Od.* 21.25-30).

Troy and Thebes in Archaic Greek poetry. In a passage, whose importance recent scholars have noted, Hesiod mentions the wars at Troy and Thebes in the same breath (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 156-65):⁶

αὐτίς ἔτ' ἄλλο τέταρτον ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
 Ζεὺς Κρονίδης ποίησε, δικαιότερον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἱ καλέονται
 ἡμίθεοι, προτέρη γενεὴ κατ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν.
 καὶ τοὺς μὲν πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνὴ,
 τοὺς μὲν ὑφ' ἑπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ, Καδμηίδι γαίῃ,
 ὤλεσε μαρναμένους μῆλων ἔνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο,
 τοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐν νήεσσιν ὑπὲρ μέγα λαῖτμα θαλάσσης
 ἐς Τροίην ἀγαγὼν Ἑλένης ἔνεκ' ἠυκόμοιο.

Zeus the son of Cronos made another race, the fourth, on the fruitful earth, more just and brave, a divine race of hero-men, who are called semi-divine, the race prior to ours, throughout the boundless earth. Evil war and dread battle destroyed them, some at seven-gated Thebes in the land of Cadmus, when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus, and others when it had led them in their ships over the great deep sea to Troy for lovely-haired Helen.

Hesiod's 'generation of hero men' not only provides a cosmological description of a prior race of men but also suggests a metapoetic reflection: in the opening lines of the *Iliad* the men fighting at Troy are marked out as 'heroes' as the poet announces the kind of narrative he is producing.⁷ In this light it is notable that Hesiod identifies *both* Troy *and* Thebes as the setting for 'evil war and dread strife' (πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνὴ), thereby suggesting that a tradition similar to that based on Troy once existed for the war at Thebes too; indeed, as a location for heroic tales Thebes may have been as ubiquitous in Archaic Greek poetry as Troy.⁸ Yet, in contrast to the narrative tradition at Troy (represented for us by the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), only fragments of a Theban tradition remain. Nevertheless, these fragments are grouped together as a narrative equivalent of the *Iliad*, known as the *Thebaid*,⁹ which scholars have looked to reconstruct using tragic representations and the comments of the scholastic tradition. For the reader who sets out to analyse the textual significations and poetic strategies that are

Again, note how Heracles is cast negatively in the themes of Odysseus' tale—he is a bad host and irreverent towards the gods.

⁶ See Graziosi and Haubold (2005) 38-9. Cf. Burgess (2001) 34; Clay (2003) 164-74. Nagy (1999 [1979]) 159-61 and 168-72 relates how this passage, in conjunction with the Myth of the Ages, sets the heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in a cosmological context.

⁷ Hom. *Il.* 1.3-4. The label 'semi-divine' (ἡμίθεοι) also appears to be a highly-charged marker for the world before our own depicted by Homeric epic: see Nagy (1999 [1979]) 159-60, who argues that 'semi-divine' is 'more appropriate to a style that looks beyond epic'. Even from the perspective of the *Iliad*, the term 'hero' may be insufficient: Haubold (2000) 4-8 notes that hero is never used to mean a leader.

⁸ As it is on the tragic stage: see Zeitlin (1986). Just as Troy is a city always condemned to fall, so Thebes is the city always under siege. Easterling (2005) 57 speculates whether it was the non-Greekness of Troy that allowed possibilities for dramatising that kind of catastrophe (utter destruction), which was potentially too close for inhabitants of a polis, like Thebes.

⁹ For several in-depth discussions including an extensive bibliography on Proclus and the Epic Cycle, see Burgess (2001) esp. 16-18. Cf. Torres Guerra (1995) and Wehrli (1957) for the suggestion that there were multiple epics about Thebes. See also Huxley (1969).

bound up in moments such as Odysseus' account of Oedipus few clear strategies have been developed.

This paper seeks to set out such a methodology for approaching the moments in which other stories or even narrative traditions appear to intrude on the articulation of Homeric narrative. Section one will briefly discuss the scholarly background for assessing such extraneous material in the Homeric poems. First, we consider and critique the rival claims of a literary aesthetic tradition of Homeric criticism, which treats Homer¹⁰ as the original source, and neo-analysis, an approach that understands the Homeric poems as alluding to specific rival texts. In place of these approaches we propose using the methodology, developed by John Miles Foley, of oral traditional theory, which explores the way in which formulaic language resonates across a broad epic tradition. We will also be concerned, however, to give adequate consideration to the agonistic character of Greek literature, which often seems absent from oral-based accounts of the traditionality of epic. Section two then tests the value of this methodology on the passage in question. Here we analyse the ways in which the language of this passage intersects with extant Archaic Greek poetry, and then develop the resonant interplay of 'Oedipus of many pains' within a broader tradition of competing poetic narratives. By exploring these interconnections with other passages, we hope to reassess the ways in which Homer—and Odysseus—appropriate the Oedipus tale, and what that might say about the interrelationship between rival narrative traditions and the aesthetics of Homeric competition.

1. *Pars pro toto*: learning to listen to Homer

1.1 The uniqueness of Homer, or reading for allusion

The relationship of the Homeric poems to rival poetic traditions and/or narratives has commonly been configured in one of two ways. The first approach, which may be classed roughly as literary criticism, has its roots in the ancient reception of Homer, and especially the editorial school of Aristarchus. It posits the Homeric poems as master narratives to which all other tales are subordinate. Jasper Griffin, for example, uses fragments from the so-called 'Epic Cycle' to argue for the uniqueness of Homer's output.¹¹ With respect to the Oedipus passage, some scholars have deduced that Homer did not know the story of Oedipus' wandering, his blindness, or the cursing of his children and, from this deduction, have asserted that these details are Sophoclean innovations.¹²

We find this approach to be insufficient for several reasons. First, the literary approach fails to account for references to extraneous material in the Homeric poems themselves.¹³ Next, it assumes that, because Homer is prior to Sophocles,

¹⁰ We use the name Homer for ease of expression to denote the poetic authority behind the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* whether that authority resides in the tradition or in the figure of a genius poet working within the tradition.

¹¹ Griffin (1977).

¹² See n.2 above.

¹³ Cf. Kakridis (1949); Willcock (1997).

his version represents the authoritative account for his time, while it may be the case that *both* poets are departing from the tradition in which they are rooted. Indeed, the scholarly enterprise that frames the typical literary response to the *Odyssey*'s Oedipus tale suffers from being too rigidly Homero-centric. Thus one recent scholar has suggested that the 'Epic Cycle' itself—as we have inherited it from Proclus and others—is the product of a long process of compilation, as the later reception of the Homeric poems required the gaps in their narratives, or the moments when other traditions are recalled, to be explained for readers of Homer for whom an oral tradition was all but lost.¹⁴ Yet, the necessity of explicating the whole story so that *readers* can understand the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* derives from a culture of interpretation radically distinct from the context of oral performance and composition in which the Homeric poems would have been produced:¹⁵ reading Homer, then, represents a different type of cognitive approach to interpretation from that of an audience attuned to (and listening out for) the broad tradition out of which the Homeric poems were forged.

The second major trend in interpreting the Homeric use of poetic traditions external to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has been neo-analysis. Initially this appears somewhat more promising, since it aims to explain the source of the extraneous material independent of the Homeric text and thereby provide new perspectives on the ways in which the Homeric poems are crafted. Indeed, neo-analysis has been important for challenging the assumption that gives priority to Homer, and sheds light on the broader background of the Homeric poems.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it rests on three debatable propositions: that the Homeric poems know of other 'fixed' poems; that they consciously recall these poems by quoting specific lines; and that they faithfully reproduce these other tales or truthfully represent their contents when they refer to them.¹⁷ Yet, from what we can judge by the use of

¹⁴ See Burgess (2001) *passim* but esp. 12-33. Burgess also criticises Griffin's assertions about the 'lateness' of the epic material (158). Indeed, other scholars have argued persuasively that Homer's partial suppression of details from rival traditions is highly nuanced. See, for example, C.J. Mackie (1997).

¹⁵ As Foley (2005) 204 puts it, 'the bard performs *pars pro toto*, the part implying the whole, without rehearsing the entire linear compass of the implied traditional context'. Instead, the literary reception of Homer, as evidenced by the scholion cited above (n.1), bears witness to the need to fill in the background to the story for a *readership*. On listening to Homer, see Scodel (2002).

¹⁶ For a survey of the uses and contribution of neo-analysis see Willcock (1997). Currie (2006) represents the most recent and sophisticated attempt to think through epic interaction using a neoanalytical (and indeed a literary critical) methodology; and we endorse Currie's emphasis on the importance of competition. Nevertheless, we contest his basic assertion that interaction can, or should, be read as *allusions* between specific *texts*.

¹⁷ For criticism of the approach that emphasises the importance of the *Aethiopis*' presentation of Antilochus and Memnon for the presentation of Achilles' vengeance over Patroclus' death in the *Iliad*, see Burgess (1997). See also Kelly (2006) for a similarly oral analysis of Nestor's retreat in *Iliad* 8. Cf. Burgess (2006). Allan (2005) 14 prefers to see 'a shared epic technique based upon a "grammar" of typical motifs and situations', rather than the influence of fixed texts. We agree with Allan that 'the pursuit of specific dependence or influence (from Homer to the cyclic poems, or vice versa) is, in the pre-textual stage of early Greek epic, a misleading methodology'.

paradeigmata in, for example, the *Iliad*, they almost always tell a different tale from that which is expected.¹⁸

Both approaches we have set out above are underpinned by a common set of assumptions: first, that there is a relation between actual and fixed texts; and, second, that this relationship is hierarchical and mono-directional. Accordingly, both approaches mine the Homeric epics in order to reconstruct alternatives rather than explore the ways in which the extraneous material is put to use within the Homeric poems themselves.¹⁹ Our next section sets out how we conceive of the performance aesthetics of Homeric poetry.

1.2 The resonance of epic verse

In order to analyse ‘Oedipus’ many pains’ in *Odyssey* 11 we propose drawing on a method that can do justice to the oral background of the Homeric epics. Of course, the idea that the Homeric epics were the product of a long tradition of oral composition has won widespread theoretical acceptance since its articulation by Parry and Lord;²⁰ but in practice scholars have found the emphasis on the formulaic nature of epic verse restrictive for literary analysis.²¹ With this in mind, we adopt the latest, more nuanced, version of oral traditional theory developed by John Miles Foley over the past two decades, in the hope of showing the comparative value of oral theory for thinking about poetic concerns in Homer.²²

To start off with, Foley suggests that from an oralist perspective it is better to think of a ‘word’, not as something visually defined by white space on a page, but as a unit of utterance.²³ Such a unit is not restricted to a single word, but could be extended to include phrases or even notions of ‘theme’ and ‘narrative’, by virtue of which it is possible to conceive of entire poems moulded out of wholly traditional material.²⁴ Thus, while particular words, phrases or even story-patterns form the basic tools of hexameter verse and contribute to oral composition, these units of utterance are extremely versatile and could be put to use in any number of different ways, according to the demands or aims of each *individual* composition or bard: the issue of individual fluidity within a general narrative tradition of an

¹⁸ E.g. Phoenix’s Meleager tale or Achilles’ use of Niobe, as Willcock (1964), a leading proponent of neo-analysis, himself demonstrates. For other examinations of Homeric *paradeigmata* see Braswell (1971), Edmunds (1997), and Nagy (1996) 13-46.

¹⁹ Half a century ago, when oral poetry still implied ‘primitive’, attempts were made to defend Homeric artistry by insisting on the relevance of digressions in Homer. The contributions made by Austin (1966) and Gaisser (1969) toward explicating the essential nature of ‘digressions’ should not be overlooked.

²⁰ For seminal works on oral theory, see M. Parry (1971) and Lord (1960). Cf. Foley (1988). For recent surveys see M.W. Edwards (1997) and Russo (1997).

²¹ For criticism of this kind, see, for example, Whallon (1969), A.A. Parry (1973), Austin (1975), and especially Rutherford (1986) 162 with n. 87; (1991-3) 53-4; (1996) 58-61.

²² Burgess (2006) makes arguments similar to ours in the mobilisation of oralism for ‘the significance of possible Homeric reflection of non-Homeric material’ (148).

²³ Foley (1997) 151-3; cf. Bakker’s (1997) 48-50 analysis of formulas as intonation units

²⁴ Foley (1997) 154.

epic is known as ‘multiformity’.²⁵ Yet, it is important to note that, at the same time, these units of utterance, which may be applied on an individual basis to individual compositions, belong to and evoke a wider epic tradition, a process which Foley labels ‘traditional referentiality’: that is to say, the broader context of an epic tradition *resonates* through each and every particular example of a unit of utterance—whether that is conceived of as a word, phrase, motif or story-pattern—to create an interwoven web of significance.²⁶

We believe that Foley’s work is important for placing due emphasis on the traditionality of Homeric verse. On the other hand, it is equally important to recognise the room for creative composition or originality in the use of the tradition, to counter the charge levelled against oral theory by Griffin.²⁷ As Ruth Scodel puts it, ‘traditionality does not depend entirely on objective tradition. It is a cultural construct, the social memory of the past.’²⁸ Therefore, our discussion here will also draw upon a broader theme that characterises ancient Greek poetics: that of poetic rivalry or competition.²⁹ We posit, therefore, that part of each poem’s force and meaning derives from the ways in which each representation positions itself in and against other versions.³⁰ And this approach, we suggest, allows for a multidirectional flow of influence that eschews conventionally applied hierarchies—such as the primacy of the Homeric poems, sealed off in a world of their own—and characterises the content of the poems as an interconnected matrix of themes with no clear or necessary original source.³¹

²⁵ Foley (2005) 202: ‘At the level of narrative structure, many oral epic traditions employ recurrent “typical scenes,” multiform units that recur in the same and different songs, varying within limits. At the top level, “story-patterns” present structural pathways for the action of entire epics; the *dramatis personae* and all other details are subject to change, but the flexible framework of the story as a whole governs the bard’s composition and the audience’s reception.’ For a multiform *Iliad*, see, for example: Nagy (1996) 29-112. Much has been written on type scenes: Fenik (1968); Arend (1975); Minchin (2001) 4-5. For recent evaluations of speech as constituting type-scenes, see Beck (2006) and Minchin (2007).

²⁶ See Foley (1999) especially 13-34; Scodel (2002) especially 1-2.

²⁷ Cf. Currie (2006) 5-6.

²⁸ Scodel (2002) 32.

²⁹ This rivalry begins with the definition and re-definition of motifs and words within shifting contexts. Such adjustments are possible—even unavoidable—because of the echoic nature of the Homeric language. Recent linguistic studies even suggest that such a competitive dynamic may be intrinsic to the language: see, for example, Bakker (1997) for an analysis of Homeric poetry as a type of speech that is closer to what is ‘natural’ but still marked as special.

³⁰ An example from Homeric epic itself shows this process as work: according to Telemachus, everyone is always eager to hear the newest song (Hom. *Od.* 1.350-2)—a sly nod to the *Odyssey*’s own ‘newness’. As Slatkin (2005) 317 puts it: ‘The latest return song of all, although they do not know it, is the one that is forming around and about them, the still unfinished, open-ended one: the *Odyssey* itself.’

³¹ Here we find the concept of the rhizome—the latest, and more nuanced, version of a linguistic tree—useful for thinking with. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) 21: ‘Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs and even nonsign states... The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots.’

To illustrate our approach we take the problematic example of the common formulaic phrase, ‘swift-footed Achilles’, which first occurs as Achilles addresses the assembly (*Il.* 1.57-8):

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἤγερθεν ὀμηγερέες τ' ἐγένοντο,
τοῖσι δ' ἀνιστάμενος μετέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς.

When they were gathered together, standing up swift-footed Achilles addressed them.

A conventional literary approach makes little sense in this context, since Achilles is standing.³² On the other hand, Parry’s formulaic theory may explain its presence—as part of the metrical sequence required in the hexameter line—but hardly convinces as an appropriate formula to be used in this context. Yet, if one applies oral traditional theory and considers that this formula triggers a mythic history of Achilles as ‘swift-footed’, its use here illustrates the complexity of meaning possible when a conventional phrase is deployed in exceptional circumstances, and indicates the ways in which a poet can appropriate ‘traditional’ elements in order to challenge the tradition itself.

For example, when an audience hears the phrase ‘swift-footed Achilles’ it recalls a matrix of associations from prior tales (which, of course, would be different for each individual listener). Yet, the present context differs from what Achilles is famed for, namely being swift of foot on the battlefield,³³ and instead draws attention to the very different situation of setting up an assembly. Indeed, this formulaic phrase sets in motion a train of events that will focus on internal conflict among the Achaeans, the importance of speech³⁴ and, ultimately, Achilles’ ‘swift-fatedness’ (cf. ὠκύμορος, *Il.* 1.417). The dissonance between this phrase’s broader significance and its first occurrence in the *Iliad*, then, suggests that the present tale is not going to be a standard Troy story,³⁵ which, in turn, points to *both* the *Iliad*’s traditionality *and* its uniqueness of representing an

³² See the discussion of ‘swift-footed Achilles’ in Graziosi and Haubold (2005) 51-3. ‘Swift-footed’ is an ancient compound in Greek traceable to Mycenaean *po-da-ko*. For a recent discussion of the creation of the compound, see Meissner (2006) 183-4.

³³ The essence of Achilles’ swift-footedness is his martial ability, the physical prowess that sets him apart from all men, such as his killing of Troilus (in the tradition), or (as we will finally see in the *Iliad*) the chase-scene around the walls of Troy with Hector (*Il.* 22).

³⁴ We do not mean to imply a dichotomy between speech and word: the *Iliad* will present the portrait of Achilles as an overwhelming force in battle, only much later. Besides, the heroic ideal, summed up by Phoenix, is to be a doer of deeds and a speaker of words (*Il.* 9.443); and Achilles later admits to having failed to live up to the complementarity of word and deed (*Il.* 18.105f.). Nevertheless, it is true to say that the *Iliad* focuses on the verbal aspect of the Achilles story. For Achilles as a man of words see Martin (1989) 146-9. Cf. Claus (1975), Friedrich and Redfield (1978) and H. Mackie (1996) 140-9.

³⁵ Graziosi and Haubold (2005) 53: ‘Repeated words or phrases such as “swift-footed Achilles” trigger a chain of associations which, we suggest, work like acoustic resonance. They suggest connections in the mind of audiences and readers that are crucial to the story, yet do not appear to be consciously manipulated at the moment of performance. Epithets are very rarely invented on the spot. And even if they are, their main function is not to capture the moment that is being described in a unique way, but to tie that moment to the larger tradition and thus endow it with resonance.’

Achilles whose anger ‘put countless pains on the Achaeans’ (μυρί’ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε’ ἔθηκε, *Il.* 1.2) and leads to strife with Agamemnon, lord of men.

Thus we conceive of a Homer utilising a conventional motif in a surprising way that, by effectively challenging the types of stories that have been heard before, forges a new tale of Achilles’ life and death. By making this contention—that poetic rivalry is a cornerstone of the Homeric approach to story telling—we recognise the work of recent scholars who have explored the competitive nature of Archaic Greek poetry.³⁶ Still, the agonistic nature of Homeric poetry—its rivalry with other poetic traditions and narratives—has generally been overlooked in literary interpretations: while that is odd, given the fact that Greek culture is almost universally avowed as agonistic, in all probability it indicates the success of the Homeric epics’ compositional strategies in silencing their epic counterparts.³⁷

In an earlier work we attempted to map out the relationship between the New Archilochus fragment and the Homeric epics by using similar methodology.³⁸ Instead of accepting ‘Homer’ as Archilochus’ elder, we argued that the works of Homer and Archilochus participate in similar poetic debates and that treating them as coevals constitutes a more productive interpretative frame. Furthermore, we suggested that the characters of the poems themselves, specifically Odysseus, were manipulating poetic themes in a manner homologous to that which we identified in the poets. Here, we wish to expand our non-hierarchical model of reading by presenting a close analysis of Homer’s and Odysseus’ appropriation of a non-Odyssean tradition.³⁹ In what remains of this paper we use the framework of traditional referentiality, along with the understanding that Archaic Greek poetry is essentially competitive, to peer under the curtain that has fallen over the Homeric stage.

2. I am Odysseus, and my fame reaches the heavens

As we have already noted, an ancient commentator used Sophocles to explain the non-Homeric story of Oedipus, while some modern commentators understand Homer as recording the original and authoritative version. Both approaches, however, neglect the embedded context for the story in the *Odyssey* and its role within the larger narrative. In the following study we will put to test the resonant interplay of ‘Oedipus of many pains’. But, before proceeding, it is first necessary

³⁶ See especially Collins (2004). Cf. Griffith (1990); Kurke (1999).

³⁷ For the deeply competitive nature of Homer’s world, see van Wees (1992) on values, and Martin (1989) and Parks (1990) on verbal duelling.

³⁸ See Barker and Christensen (2006). Cf. Irwin (2005) for a similar analysis of the rivalry between martial elegy, Solon and Homeric epic.

³⁹ In that earlier article we define our terms in the following way: ‘*Iliadic* to denote the narrative tradition and the values promoted by the kind of tale of the war at Troy that the *Iliad* presents (e.g. the focus on Achilles’ wrath and kleos); *un-Iliadic* an idea or strategy not championed by our *Iliad* (or its tradition as defined above); *anti-Iliadic* an idea or strategy antagonistic to our *Iliad* (and its tradition); finally, *Odyssean* the narrative tradition and the values promoted by the kind of tale of the return from Troy that the *Odyssey* presents (e.g. the focus on Odysseus’ return and kleos)’: Christensen and Barker (2006) 16 n.2.

to establish the context of the Oedipus passage, the most important element of which is its location within the broader narrative of Odysseus' tale to his Phaeacian hosts.

From a narratological perspective the whole of *Odyssey* 9-12 represents a character-text: that is to say, it is spoken by a character within the narrative, with the result that it possesses a qualitatively different status than that of the main narrative, particularly if we bear in mind the Homeric epithet of the speaker, Odysseus, as a man 'of many wiles' (*polumêtis*, *Od.* 2.173).⁴⁰ Our passage, then, must be read within the broader context of Odysseus' rhetorical strategy in mind. His song also has real consequence: he is singing for his *nostos*.⁴¹ The immediate context too has relevance. Oedipus is introduced through his mother, who belongs to a long list of women whom Odysseus says he sees in the underworld: these women are all mentioned in relation to a celebrated male known to us from tradition, a legendary father, husband, or son. Moreover, the very form of Odysseus' presentation is typical of a particular kind of narrative popular in Archaic Greek poetry, that of the catalogue:⁴² his use of this form aligns him with the compositional strategies of epic narrators. Thus Odysseus' appropriation of this traditional narrative form already suggests rivalry: his account of his underworld adventures carries with it a value judgement on rival figures and an implicit comparison to his own performance as a hero. After all, the female figure with whom he begins the catalogue is *his* mother.

The effect of Odysseus' narrative strategy comes across in two ways. First, the impact of its performance is quite explicitly recognised. After the catalogue of women, he is handsomely rewarded when Arete calls for the leading Phaeacian men to give him gifts (*Od.* 11.335-41): the Phaeacian queen, at any rate, has been impressed by Odysseus' account of famous women.⁴³ Then, when questioned about the heroes of Troy by Alcinous, Odysseus changes his tale abruptly to meet that request (*Od.* 11.370-6).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ On Odysseus' 'apologia' see Frame (1978) 34-73; Most (1989); H. Parry (1994); Olson (1995) 43-64; de Jong (2001) 149-51. On the theory of narratology: Genette (1980) 172-3.

⁴¹ Odysseus' ability as a story-teller is especially prodigious—that he can interrupt his own tales implies a command over his audience according to Rabel (2002). For differences between storytelling in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* see Minchin (2001) 205-6.

⁴² Such as the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, on which see Hunter (ed.) (2005). For the *Odyssey*'s catalogue of women, see Northrup (1980); Pade (1983); Doherty (1995) 66-8; de Jong (2001) 281-4. For a recent examination of the Nekuia see Sammons (2006) 113-42, who argues that Odysseus' use of the catalogue differs from the narrator's.

⁴³ Here we might also recall Athena's advice to Odysseus to pay special attention to Arete. Before Odysseus arrives at the palace, Athena states quite clearly that if he pleases Arete then he will get to go home (*Od.* 7.75-7). Following this, Doherty (1992) 168 makes the catalogue's explicit goal the pleasing of Arete. Cf. Wyatt (1989); Doherty (1991). Slatkin (1996) 230 suggests that Alcinous requests a different song because he objects to the material; according to Slatkin, Alcinous expects a 'kleos-song' which would include different subject-matter and would be narrative rather than a catalogue. Cf. Sammons (2006) 125-6.

⁴⁴ We should not overlook Alcinous' praise in this section. Alcinous notes that, while there are many men on the earth who fashion lies (ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτόνοντας, 11.366), Odysseus is graced by the 'shape of *epēa*' themselves (σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφῇ ἐπέων, 367) and he records a tale as skilfully as a bard (μῦθον δ' ὥς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας, 368). The narrator of the

Second, Odysseus' choice of characters to catalogue and the way he represents them intimately reflects the concerns of *his* narrative. All the heroes from Troy, whom he cites, play a role: Agamemnon's appearance allows Odysseus to present the counter-model of a bad homecoming for his as yet unaccomplished *nostos* (*Od.* 11.406-64);⁴⁵ Achilles rejects fame, denigrates his position among the dead, and asks after the well-being of his father and son (*Od.* 11.474-538)—all in stark opposition to his Iliadic counterpart;⁴⁶ the picture of a silent Ajax taking his grudge to the grave contrasts with Odysseus' magnanimous invitation to let bygones be bygones (*Od.* 11.541-67). Afterwards, Odysseus is recognised by Heracles, who not only pities Odysseus (καὶ μ' ὀλυφνυρόμενος) but also expresses empathy with him for their similar toils (ἄ δαίλ', ἦ τινὰ καὶ σὺ κακὸν μόρον ἠγηλάζεις, / ὅν περ ἐγὼν ὀχέεσκον ὑπ' ἀνγὰς ἡελίοιο, *Od.* 11.618-19)—and this from the hero whose underworld exploits represent the model for trips to Hades.⁴⁷ So, too, in his catalogue of women, Odysseus takes the opportunity to pass over a range of rival heroes, or even rival traditions: the prominence of Thebes certainly suggests a subtle commentary on, and challenge to, that narrative tradition.⁴⁸ His account of his underworld exploits, including his meeting with famous women, demonstrates Odysseus' concern to place himself in the canon of heroic figures; we must never forget that his name is the first and last entry in the list. This is the frame for reading Odysseus' mention of 'Oedipus of many pains'.

2.1 Do you hurt like I do? *Algea polla* and the house of pain (*Od.* 11.275, 279-80)

ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλὰς...

Odyssey, however, provides a caveat for such compliments: not only does Odysseus lie elsewhere in the epic; after he has told one of his 'Cretan lies' to Penelope, the narrator declares that 'he knew many lies similar to the truth' (ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, 19.203). Odysseus as *aoidos* walks the same line as Hesiod's muses from the *Theogony* who 'know how to speak many things that are similar to the truth, and know how to utter true things when [they] want to' (ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα / ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι, 27-8). For scholarship on Odysseus' lies, see Minchin (2007) 269-70.

⁴⁵ On Agamemnon's *nostos* as a counter-model, see Olson (1990); Katz (1991) 29-53; Felson-Rubin (1994) 95-107.

⁴⁶ A.T. Edwards (1985).

⁴⁷ Currie (2006) 22 n.102 reads this interaction in terms of allusion between texts: 'The *Odyssey* confronts an earlier lost **Herakleis* at *Od.* 11.601-26, and an earlier lost **Catalogue of Women* at *Od.* 11.225-332.' See also Danek (1998) 231: 'Odysseus shows himself... as a hero who could potentially be brought into contact with every heroic story known to the listener, and our *Odyssey* presents itself as an epic which could potentially take up the material of all known epics and thus ultimately replace all other epics' [Currie's translation].

⁴⁸ The women who are listed before Epicaste all relate to Thebes: Antiope, whose sons establish Thebes and built its walls (*Od.* 11.260-5); Alcmena, who bore Heracles, hero of Thebes and of many rival representations (*Od.* 11.266-8); Megara, who was not only the daughter of Creon but also married Heracles (*Od.* 11.269-70). Passages that emphasise Heracles' immortal nature tend to mention his divine consort Hebe. Cf. *Od.* 11.602-3; Hes. *Th.* 950-5; Hes. fr. 25.18-28 and 229.7-9; and *h. Hom.* 15 (to Heracles).

... τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς ἐρινύες ἐκτελέου.

But he continued to rule over Cadmeans in much-loved Thebes, albeit suffering pains, through the god's baleful plans... leaving her son to bear as many pains as a mother's Furies bring to fulfilment.

The point of Odysseus' narrative frame comes to the fore when we explore the passage's formulaic lines and their interplay with the broader tradition. Arguably, the most resonant expression in the lines on Oedipus' fate relates to his description as 'suffering many pains' (ἄλγεα πάσχων, 11.275; ἄλγεα πολλὰ, 11.279-80). The *Odyssey* puts suffering 'pains' on the agenda from its beginning (*Od.* 1.1-5):

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱέρον πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
ἀρνύμενος ἥν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven off many times, after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. He saw cities and knew the mind of many men, and suffered many pains on the sea in his heart, struggling for his life and the *nostos* of his companions.

This programmatic statement immediately establishes a matrix of associations between *algea*, the hero and the narrative in the poet's announcement (but not full disclosure) of his epic's subject matter: the narrator advertises Odysseus' suffering of many pains as the hero's struggle for his life and for the homecoming of his companions. Before documenting and assessing the resonance of *algea* in the *Odyssey* and its function within Odysseus' Oedipus story, however, we wish first to establish the credentials of suffering more generally and to show its potential to invite multiple responses to the events of Homeric epic. For this we turn to its manifestations in the *Iliad*.⁴⁹

Like the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*'s proem presents a similar network of associations around the muse, hero and narrative; more striking still is the prominence of 'many pains' in both passages (*Il.* 1.1-5):

μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή.

Sing, goddess, about the anger of the son of Peleus, Achilles, destructive, which put countless pains on the Achaeans, and sent many mighty souls of heroes into Hades, and made them carrion for all dogs and birds, and the will of Zeus was being accomplished.

⁴⁹ The historical semantics of *algea* indicates suffering inflicted on others; cf. Meissner (2006) 117-18.

Given the similarities between the two proems, it is perhaps tempting to view the experience of many pains as a typical feature of Homeric epic narrative.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, important differences remain, the most relevant of which for our study is the description of ‘many pains’ as the object of the narrative’s dominant theme of the wrath of Achilles: his wrath causes ‘countless pains’ for the heroes of the Achaeans, and sent many to their death.⁵¹ At the beginning of the *Iliad*, then, *algea* belong not to the hero as in the *Odyssey*, but to other men. Moreover, they are associated with death, not, as in the example of Odysseus, with homecoming.⁵² All this is set out within the framework of the eventual completion of Zeus’ will (Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή).

The hint of the connection between men’s suffering and the will of the gods indicated by the *Iliad*’s proem develops over the course of its narrative. Since this evolving meaning of suffering, moreover, may inform Odysseus’ decision to attribute *algea* to Oedipus, it is worthwhile to assay a brief survey here. To start out, the narrator first describes Apollo’s plague as *algea* (*Il.* 1.96 and 110). Soon afterwards, he fashions the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles—the narrative drive of the whole poem—in the same terms by labelling the false dream, Zeus’ response to the quarrel of book one, as providing *algea* (*Il.* 2.39). A concrete manifestation of this occurs as Zeus, together with Poseidon, wreaks ‘bitter pains’ on the fighting warriors, since he (Zeus) willed victory for the Trojans in honour of Achilles (*Il.* 13.346). From this divine perspective *algea* relate to death and destruction of the race of heroes in war.⁵³

While Zeus oversees the suffering of men, it is with men themselves that responsibility lies nevertheless. Both participants in the quarrel recognise that it has brought them pain. Forced to reconsider his position by the turbulent events of the second assembly, Agamemnon acknowledges that Zeus ‘has given him pains’ (ἀλλὰ μοι αἰγίοχος Κρονίδης Ζεὺς ἄλγε’ ἔδωκεν, *Il.* 2.375) by making him fight with Achilles. Achilles himself, when later describing the conflict from his perspective, uses the same language of pain: his loss of Briseis causes him *algea* (*Il.* 16.55).

But the quarrel is not the only cause of the heroes’ suffering. Underlying even this event is one that goes deeper still to the origins of the conflict itself. As we are introduced to Helen for the first time, the Trojan elders comment: ‘There’s no

⁵⁰ Holmes (2007) in examining wounds in the *Iliad* comments upon the thematic importance of *algea*: a ‘complex, multi-layered engagement with suffering also inaugurates a tradition of questioning whether those twin pleasantries, undying *kleos* and Helen, justified their costs’ (81).

⁵¹ For the theme of Achilles’ wrath in the *Iliad* and in Archaic poetry in general, see Muellner (1996).

⁵² Who suffers and how they suffer is not as we might have imagined: Achaeans, not Trojans, suffer many pains as the result of Achilles’ rage; they do not receive glory in recompense for their suffering, rather their souls are sent to Hades.

⁵³ Similarly, when Agamemnon attempts a binding oath, he begs to be given *algea* by the gods if he breaks it (19.264). In the world of Hesiod’s *Works and Days* the gods can send pains to man for any infraction, such as crossing a river improperly (τῷ δὲ θεοὶ νεμεσῶσι καὶ ἄλγεα δῶκαν ὀπίσσω, 741). In Theognis as well grief comes from the gods (1187-1190). Rijksbaron (1992) notes that *didōmi* is used frequently for gods bestowing *algea* on mortals whereas the verb *tithēmi* is used when humans impose them. Cf. Holmes (2007) 50.

nemesis for fighting over someone so beautiful and *suffering pains* for such a length of time' (οὐ νέμεσις Τρῳᾶς καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς / τοιῆδ' ἄμφι γυναικὶ πολλὸν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν, *Il.* 3.156-7). Their judgement offers a commentary on the Trojan War and the *Iliad's* narrative: both sides fighting over Helen. In other traditions Helen seems to be associated with the destruction of the race of heroes.⁵⁴ The echo of the *Iliad's* proem in the assessment by the Trojan elders that both sides suffer pain connects this telling of the Troy story—with its focus on Achilles' wrath—with the broader tradition, which has as its origins Paris' choice and the abduction of Helen.

The *algea* that issue from Achilles' wrath, then, express an ever-shifting and ever-expanding web of connections, to which the characters themselves seem to be alive.⁵⁵ Menelaus, for example describes how grief comes to him since both sides suffered because of the quarrel between him and Paris (μάλιστα γὰρ ἄλγος ἰκάνει θυμὸν ἐμόν, *Il.* 3.97-8). Grief, in this case, is self-replicating: it starts with the strife of individuals (as with Agamemnon and Achilles) but expands to include the epic suffering of everyone involved which, in turn, creates more grief for the pensive Menelaus. More strikingly, in his rejection of the embassy in book nine, Achilles returns to the idea of many pains introduced in the proem, but this time with a twist (*Il.* 9.318-22):

ἴση μοῖρα μένοντι, καὶ εἰ μάλα τις πολεμίζου·
ἐν δὲ ἰῆ τιμῇ ἡμὲν κακὸς ἡδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός·
κάτθαν' ὁμῶς ὃ τ' ἀεργὸς ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐοργῶς.
οὐδὲ τί μοι περίκειται, ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῷ
αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν.

Fate is the same for who hangs back as who fights most; coward and brave have like honour; who doesn't work dies the same as who works a lot. Nothing is won for me, though I suffered pain in my heart always risking my life to fight.⁵⁶

It is important to note that Achilles is making a rhetorical claim of outstanding performance on the battlefield: he wants to stress the effort he has made in order to magnify the insult Agamemnon showed him by taking his prize. Nevertheless, the recurrence of *algea* here marks a striking reversal of the proem, in which we identified pains as the object of his wrath: now Achilles insists that *he* is the one suffering pains.⁵⁷ This is more in the manner of the suffering hero of the

⁵⁴ According to fr. 1 of the so-called *Cypria*. See Mayer (1996) for Helen's connection to Zeus' plan; and Marks (2002) for the 'junction' between the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*.

⁵⁵ It is not only mankind who suffer *algea* in wars. Dione, in book 5, tells Aphrodite that the gods cause each other harsh griefs over men (ἐξ ἀνδρῶν χαλέπ' ἄλγε' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι τιθέντες, *Il.* 5.384). At *Il.* 5.394 she describes the pain caused to Hera by Heracles; shortly afterwards Zeus makes the point of stopping the pains of Ares (5.895). At *Il.* 17.445 Zeus pities Achilles' horses, which though immortal suffer pains because of their attachment to mortals (they are described as feeling *algea* at *Il.* 18.224). Indeed, although the gods try to avoid *algea*, it can become a dominant part of their own narratives in book eighteen: Hephaestus relates how he suffered because of Hera but was rescued by Athena (18.395-7); Thetis claims her share of suffering from Zeus because of her mortal son (18.429-30).

⁵⁶ For other correlations between *algea*, martial toil and death, see *Il.* 13.670, 17.375 and 21.585.

⁵⁷ The *Iliad's* narrative also seems to dismiss rivals for its hero's claim to suffer most. Thus in the catalogue of ships the phrase 'suffering pains' (ἄλγεα πάσχων) occurs twice and occupies the same end-line position as it does in our example of Oedipus' pains—the only two examples of this

Odyssey's proem than the *Iliad*'s depiction of a people suffering because of Achilles⁵⁸ and, along with the comments by the other heroes, shows the increasing human focus of the *Iliad*'s narrative in contrast to its divine beginnings.⁵⁹

The *Iliad*'s exploration of 'many pains' focuses on the role and responsibility of the heroes, in particular Achilles, who articulates the common man's concern of putting one's life on the line in battle; but it is not last word on the subject. That goes to the wife of the man whom Achilles slays, Andromache. In her lament over Hector's body, Andromache makes it clear that her husband's death 'leaves behind grievous pains' (λελείπεται ἄλγεα λυγρὰ, 24.742) not only for her, but also for her family and city.⁶⁰ With these words Andromache extends the concept of *algea* from the painful striving of the hero to the suffering fate of those who are left behind and dependent on their man—the family unit and the wider political community more broadly.⁶¹ Furthermore, the idea of leaving behind pains is picked up by our passage: Epicaste leaves behind pains for Oedipus.⁶²

From this brief survey of the evidence for the phrase 'many pains' in the *Iliad*, two tentative conclusions may be reached. First, it appears that the phrase advertises epic subject matter par excellence: 'suffering many pains' may be considered a defining feature of epic narrative insofar as it relates to both Zeus' plan to depopulate the world and the human responses to that.⁶³ In its

formula in the *Iliad*. But, while it serves to mark out two rival heroes, Tlepolemus (*Il.* 2.667) and Philoctetes (2.721), neither hero comes close to rivalling Achilles: Tlepolemus settled in Rhodes and had wealth showered upon him by Zeus; Philoctetes, while currently languishing on his deserted island, would soon be remembered by the Achaeans. The formula occurs a further six times in the *Odyssey* (including its use in relation to Oedipus): on each occasion it occurs in character-text (*Od.* 4.372, 5.13, 5.362, 15.232, 19.170), with the exception of a metaphor at *Od.* 5.295.

⁵⁸ The names of both Achilles and Odysseus may have thematic connection with grief. Achilles, whose name has been etymologised as 'woe for the host' may have an essential connection to causing pain. See Nagy (1999) 69-71. Odysseus, whose name has been related to *odusasthai* may be 'hated' because of his tricks or he may be hated by the gods and thus suffer, depending on the interpretation of his name: see Stanford (1952); Rutherford (1986) 157 n.63; (1992) on *Od.* 19.406-9.

⁵⁹ Cf. Graziosi and Haubold (2005).

⁶⁰ Andromache's lament is similar to a partial line from Hesiod's *Works and Days* (τὰ δὲ λείπεται ἄλγεα λυγρὰ / θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, 200-1), where it is Shame and Nemesis (Αἰδῶς καὶ Νέμεσις, 200) who bring pains to the race of Iron for their misbehaviour. Penelope also notes that pains have been left behind for her (*Od.* 19.330).

⁶¹ Cf. Priam's plea for Hector to avoid Achilles (*Il.* 22.53-4) and his reaction after Hector's death. Also of importance for the theme of grief in the *Iliad* is the exchange of *algea* between Achilles and Priam in book 24. Before he arrives at Achilles' dwelling, Priam ascribes his pains to Zeus (*Il.* 24.241). Achilles asks for Priam to set his grief aside (24.522) but warns him not to cause him more pains (24.568).

⁶² As we will argue below, leaving behind pains is the focus of the *Odyssey*'s treatment of this resonant formula.

⁶³ In the *Iliad* Zeus' plan is explicitly connected to causing pain for the Achaeans and Trojans in the wake of Achilles' absence from battle: the lying dream has the result of intensifying the conflict (*Il.* 2.39). Even so, the presence in line 1.7 of the formulaic expression 'and the will of Zeus was being accomplished' means that Zeus' plan also potentially incorporates the entire

instrumentalised form, grief is part of Zeus' plan and is interwoven into the fabric of the story from beginning to end; but it also becomes a dominant theme of the characters' reflections on the conduct of the war. Following on from this last observation, the *Iliad* demonstrates an ever-broadening range of associations related to an ever-increasing human focus. Its narrative conceives of *algea* not only as pains for the heroes in war, as Zeus' plan determines and many heroes, notably Achilles, articulate; it also presents *algea* as a disruption to both family and civic life. All three associations come together over the course of the *Odyssey* with a particular emphasis on those left behind and the survival of the hero.

Suffering pains is central to Odysseus' characterisation throughout the poem; in the mouth of the gods, it demonstrates once more the close association of the narrative's subject matter with its structure. After the narrative's opening salvo (*Od.* 1.4) Zeus puts pains on the agenda, associating them explicitly with men's responsibility: by their own recklessness men win grief beyond what is fated (1.34). Athena, however, immediately qualifies Zeus' complaints against men: Odysseus, she points out, is suffering griefs unjustifiably (*Od.* 1.49-50). Five books later, and with still no sign of the man of many turns, Athena again raises the issues of Odysseus' pains, using an exact replica of the line used of Philoctetes in the *Iliad* (2.721)—another rival suffering hero left behind on a desert island (5.13). Its occurrence in the *Odyssey*, however, marks the *end* of Odysseus' isolation and serves to activate his reintegration into the society of men *and* his into the narrative.⁶⁴

Algea also features prominently at another crucial juncture in the story: when Odysseus first arrives back on Ithaca and meets with his guardian goddess, her words to him contain the following advice (*Od.* 13.307-10):

... σὺ δὲ τετλάμεναι καὶ ἀνάγκη,
μηδὲ τῷ ἐκφάσθαι μήτ' ἀνδρῶν μήτε γυναικῶν,
πάντων, οὐνεκ' ὄρ' ἦλθες ἀλώμενος, ἀλλὰ σιωπῇ
πάσχειν ἄλγεα πολλά, βίας ὑποδέγμενος ἀνδρῶν.

You must by necessity endure, and tell no one of all men and women that you have come back wandering, but suffer many pains in silence, accept the violence of men.

In a reworking of the *Odyssey*'s opening statement Athena instructs Odysseus not to let it be known that he has returned after his wanderings, but rather to suffer many pains in silence. Here, then, Athena intimately, yet quite explicitly, connects Odysseus' many pains to his wandering. Similarly, when husband and wife first meet again, Odysseus (in disguise) tells Penelope the story of how he has wandered the cities of men suffering pains (19.170).⁶⁵

narrative of the *Iliad*, including the initial quarrel which provoke Achilles' wrath in the first place. For an analysis of the polysemy of Zeus' will, see Clay (1999).

⁶⁴ *Od.* 17.142. For other narrative assessments of Odysseus' suffering, see *Od.* 2.343, 5.83, 5.157, 5.336, 5.395, 13.90, 14.32, and 16.19. On the *Odyssey*'s re-start, see Segal (1994) 124.

⁶⁵ The arrival home after suffering grief becomes a dominant trope throughout the epic: Athena figures herself in such a fashion (*Od.* 3.232); Peisistratus gnominically reflects on the suffering a son of an absent father experiences (*Od.* 4.164). Suffering remains paramount in descriptions of tales

It may come as no surprise to find that Odysseus himself becomes the master of testifying to his own suffering—both real and fabricated: in many ways his story is defined by his willingness and capacity to endure. In one of his first speeches, he predicts that he will suffer before his return home will be complete (5.302).⁶⁶ Indeed, his story to the Phaeacians, the very frame for the Oedipus tale, is dominated by references to his suffering.⁶⁷

Yet *algea* do not belong exclusively to Odysseus: in fact, its growing inclusiveness becomes an important part of the story. When he finds out that Athena has let Telemachus go abroad, Odysseus asks whether she did so in order that his son too ‘would suffer pains while wandering over the barren sea (ἦ ἴνα που καὶ κεῖνος ἀλώμενος ἄλγεα πάσχη / πόντον ἐπ’ ἀτρύγετον, 13.418-9). Like his father, Telemachus will return to Ithaca as an exemplar of grief:⁶⁸ just as going out in search of his father’s *kleos* plays an essential part of his epic maturation, so his experience of grief ensures his status as his father’s son. But that is not all. Earlier in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus first arrives back in human society and encounters a model—and rival—*oikos*, he has words of advice for its marriageable maiden, Nausicaa: not only may the gods grant her a man and a house; may she also enjoy *homophrosunê* with her husband too.⁶⁹ (The *oikos* itself is not sufficient.) He continues (*Od.* 6.182-5):

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἢ ὅθ’ ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
ἄνῃρ ἡδὲ γυνή· πόλλ’ ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,
χάρματα δ’ εὐμενέτησι· μάλιστα δέ τ’ ἔκλυον αὐτοί.

For nothing is better or stronger than this: when two people, a man and woman who are likeminded in ideas keep a house; many pains for their enemies, a delight for their friends; but they are especially famous.

Thus *homophrosunê* allows a man and wife in tandem to give *algea* to others, rather than experience it themselves: critically, too, their fame derives from this ability.⁷⁰ The sentiment strikingly foreshadows the end of the *Odyssey*, where the

that precede the story-time of the *Odyssey*: Nestor describes the continued suffering of the Achaeans (3.220); cf. Achilles’ comments at 24.27, or Menelaus’ description of his own (4.373).

⁶⁶ Cf. *Od.* 5.362, 7.212, 8.182, and 19.483.

⁶⁷ See *Od.* 9.75, 9.121, 10.142, 10.458, 12.427. Odysseus maintains suffering as a dominant theme of his lies as well (see 13.263, 14.310, 15.345, 15.487, and 19.170). Figures whom Odysseus sees in the underworld are ordered by their suffering: both Tantalus and Sisyphus are defined by their eternal torment (11.582 and 593).

⁶⁸ The same line is used later when Odysseus finally meets his son (16.189 = 13.310). This is truly the father and son who have both suffered many pains.

⁶⁹ Bolmarcich (2001) suggests that Odysseus’ words here point to a Penelope who closely resembles him. Evidence from Archaic poetry, she argues, reveals that Odysseus may be expecting her to be more like a male colleague.

⁷⁰ It is important to note that Odysseus also shares his *algea* with his family. His continued absence and suffering yields grief that becomes definitive for his wife Penelope (see *Od.* 4.722) and his son Telemachus (see 2.41, 2.193, 17.13). When he meets Telemachus for the first time and announces his identity, Odysseus triangulates his identity with his son’s suffering: he is the father on whose account Telemachus has suffered many griefs (16.189). This shared trait extends to members of his household: Eumaeus requests that both of them take a break from their sorrows (15.400-1). Cf. 19.471 where Odysseus’ nurse experiences grief, and 20.203 and 221 for descriptions of grief by

like-mindedness of husband and wife allows Odysseus to be the agent of pains rather than recipient.

Thus far we have seen not only that *algea* features prominently in the *Odyssey*'s opening frame and narrative structure; it also has special resonance with Odysseus and his homecoming, particularly in Odysseus' narrative about himself. One consequence of the depth of Odysseus' suffering and its relevance to the poem as a whole is the possibility that the *Odyssey* is positioning itself in and against the *Iliad*, or, at least, an Iliadic tradition centred on the fight for Troy: it appropriates the language of suffering in war and particularises it within the single example of Odysseus' successful homecoming. By means of this move the *Odyssey* presents a network of relations that appears to run deeper than that in the *Iliad* where *algea* are largely connected with the Trojan War and the Achaeans' suffering (especially Achilles'); in the *Odyssey* it extends to the family beyond the individual hero (though Andromache's pain—articulated at the end of the *Iliad*—anticipates this association). Furthermore, it points to rival families and broken homes. On this last point the resonant interplay of *algea* intersects with the *Odyssey*'s focus on generational continuity, in which Odysseus' family excels: a single male inheritance line extends from Laertes through Odysseus to Telemachus. Over the course of its narrative, the *Odyssey* juxtaposes the success of Odysseus' line with those of his fellow warriors at Troy, whether Agamemnon, Achilles or even Nestor.⁷¹ But we contend that the house of Laius, for all of its brevity, serves a similar purpose: in contrast to the perfect House of Laertes (grandfather-father-son) is the twisted House of Laius, where the generational continuity and patrilineal inheritance is all confused.⁷²

Thus, by attributing many pains to Oedipus, Odysseus is participating in the same type of thematic rivalry that *his* narrator draws upon to define the *Odyssey*'s world against the *Iliad*'s. By granting Oedipus pains, Odysseus marks him out as an epic hero; but the attendant details of his Oedipus-song undermine such an identification.⁷³

The implicit thematic comparison is also charged. In the *Odyssey*, *algea* resonates with a network of associations with Odysseus and his family, where the comparison to Oedipus could be felt to be particularly charged: Oedipus, the hero who does not enjoy sound relations with his nearest and dearest, who, moreover, experiences pains *because* of his wife/mother and not *during* an attempt to reunite

the cowherd Philoitos. Not surprisingly, it is in part the refusal to accept grief as important that sets one of the suitors apart from Odysseus and his family. Antinoos trivializes the grief of the cowherd (21.88).

⁷¹ On the broken family lines of Achilles and Agamemnon, see n.45 above. Nestor too provides a counter-example to the success of Odysseus' line: his thoughts are still fixed on the son he lost at Troy, Antilochus (*Od.* 3.111-2).

⁷² Slatkin (2005) 323 suggests that the other poetic traditions (one of example of which to us is known as the 'Telegony') showed Odysseus pursuing his other options and—crucially—having offspring. Odysseus' only competition in stringing the bow comes from his own son: but the *Odyssey* 'does not pursue the implications of such a rivalry' (326).

⁷³ The structure of the passage may enforce this: the separation of the adjective πολλά from its noun, ἄλγεα, emphasised by enjambment (τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω / πολλά μάλ') comes almost as an afterthought.

his family. In this way, Odysseus comes off best in their match-up: both figures suffer, but it is Odysseus who suffers for all the right reasons. In addition to this, by mobilising his suffering in song and inserting himself for comparison into the canon of heroes, Odysseus will secure passage home and thereby complete his besting of Oedipus. Hence, it is paramount that Oedipus is introduced through his wife and mother, Epicaste: she is the subject of this passage and it is her ‘great deed’ that begins the tale.

2.2 Doers and deeds: Epicaste’s *mega ergon* (11.272)

μητέρα τ’ Οἰδιπόδαο ἶδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρεῖσσι νόοιο
γημαμένη ᾧ υἱῷ· ὁ δ’ ὄν πατέρ’ ἐξεναρίζας
γῆμεν·

And I saw the mother of Oedipus, fair Epicaste, who unwittingly did a great thing by marrying her own son; he, after killing his own father, married her.

From our analysis of Odysseus’ assertion that Oedipus suffered many pains we hope to have shown that there is a meaningful connection between Homeric poetry’s conceptualisation of a man of epic and the recognition that such a man has suffered pains in the course of his story. These pains themselves have different causes depending upon the story-at-large. In Achilles’ tale, *algea* is at once the motivation behind his behaviour and the consequence of his rage; he experiences and bestows griefs in turn until his story is nearing its end. From the perspective of Andromache, *algea* will issue from the death of Hector and the dissolution of Troy. In the *Odyssey*, *algea* are the obstacles to a homecoming, on the one hand, but, on the other, they are the very challenges by which achieving homecoming becomes worthy of poetry itself.

There is, then, a changing emphasis on the importance of pains depending upon the interests of the story-frame. A phrase from Odysseus’ Oedipus tale that exhibits a similar pattern of slippage and transformation in Archaic Greek poetry is Epicaste’s ‘great deed’ (ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρεῖσσι νόοιο). In this section we show that Odysseus’ use of this phrase markedly and significantly differs from that of Homeric poetry in general, and suggest that this individual difference offers a unique perspective on what Odysseus is *doing* with his Oedipus tale.

The first and most obvious usage of *mega ergon* in Homeric poetry is to denote some kind of exceptional deed. This meaning accounts for the vast majority of cases in the *Iliad*, though only once is it used with this positive sense in the *Odyssey*—and then in the Iliadic battle narrative of *Odyssey* book 22.⁷⁴ A survey of the *Iliad* supplies three further categories, all of which relate to the idea of exceptionality. At *Iliad* 7.444 the phrase explains why the gods are watching the war, because men are performing deeds worthy of note.⁷⁵ Twice *mega ergon* denotes a deed that can no longer be performed by a man of the epic’s audience

⁷⁴ See *Il.* 11.734 (Nestor as narrator), 12.416, 13.366; *Od.* 22. 408. This pattern seems to continue at *Th.* 954 and *Hes. Sc.* 22 and 38. Cf. *Hes. fr.* 195.22 and 38. On the Iliadic resonances of *Odyssey* book 22, see Pucci (1987).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Hes. fr.* 195.20 where the gods are sitting as witnesses to Amphytrion’s big deed.

(*Il.* 5.303 and 20.286)—as if *megala erga* are the specific province of the generation of the past, the race of heroes, the subject of epic song. Examples in character-speech preserve this valence: combatants use *mega ergon* to denote martial accomplishments of an outstanding nature, which are viewed by the characters themselves in positive light.⁷⁶ For instance, Hector ultimately faces Achilles in the hope that he might accomplish ‘some great deed’ (*mega ti*) and achieve eternal fame.⁷⁷ In the *Iliad*’s world an ‘exceptional deed’ is almost unambiguously positive as the subject and guarantor of eternal fame, and worthy of epic narration.

In the *Odyssey*, with the exception of its occurrence in an Iliadic battle-scene that has already been noted, the phrase takes an interesting turn. Its first instance sets the tone for the ‘big deed’ in the *Odyssey*. Nestor, relating Agamemnon’s disastrous homecoming to Telemachus, twice uses the phrase to denote Aegisthus’ plot against Agamemnon, and in particular his seduction of Clytemnestra (*Od.* 3.261 and 275). From this point on it becomes a description not only from which the characters distance themselves, but also over which the supporters and enemies of Odysseus do battle. Most conspicuous is Odysseus’ use of the phrase to describe his companions’ barbequing of the cattle of the Sun (*Od.* 12.373), or when he sees the suitors arming with the help of Melanthius (*Od.* 22.149); but it is also used by the suitors to bemoan Telemachus’ voyage (*Od.* 4.663; 16.346), and by Penelope of the suitors’ behaviour towards the beggar (Odysseus) at *Od.* 18.221.

The battle-lines are clearly drawn over the ‘big deed’ in the last pairing in the epic. Eupheithes accuses Odysseus of ‘working evil’ against the Achaeans having lost his people, whom he took to Troy, and then killing the rest on his return (24.426). In response Halitherses directly condemns the suitors of a great wrong in acting with evil recklessness (24.458)—thereby aligning himself with the narrator’s assessment of Odysseus’ companions, who are lost ‘by their own recklessness’ (1.7).⁷⁸

Our suggestion is that the phrase *mega ergon* acts as an index for the change of values from the *Iliad*’s world of war to Odysseus’ world of homecoming. This is borne out in part by the absence of the phrase from Archaic Greek poetry, most notably from Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, where *erga* comes to denote deeds that are not worthy of fame but regular and boring, the one thing that separates the good from the bad (*Op.* 311, 316, 382, 554, 779).⁷⁹ Now *erga* are simply the daily toil that every man must face and suffer, but the performance of which can help men attain a higher degree of morality.

⁷⁶ *Il.* 10.282, 16.208, and 19.150.

⁷⁷ μή μὲν ἀσπυδί γε καὶ ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην, / ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι, *Il.* 22.304-5.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Th.* 209. Additionally relevant may be the ascription of *megala erga* to Heracles discussed above at n.4. Although Heracles certainly achieved great deeds, in the *Odyssey*’s narrative these great deeds are subordinated to his unexplained and explicitly unjustified murder of Iphitus.

⁷⁹ To support this argument, the phrase only occurs once in Pindar and it is in the description of the deeds of the age of heroes (see below). It is entirely absent from the playwrights, and occurs in fairly un-noteworthy ways twice in Herodotus and once in Thucydides.

Like the phrase ‘many pains’, *mega ergon* seems intimately connected to the *Odyssey*’s narrative dynamics and its turn away from the Iliadic celebration of martial deeds on the battlefield. The Odyssean stance is that *mega ergon* means big trouble: it implies that such striving, rather than helping men to achieve fame, amounts to overreaching, what Archaic poetry would call *hubris*. In the *Odyssey*, where we have turned away from the themes of war, it becomes clear that the *mega ergon* has the potential to threaten if not deny homecoming altogether. When Odysseus attributes a *mega ergon* to Epicaste, then, we suggest that he is impugning not only the act itself but also the achievement of great deeds in general. On one level, Odysseus undermines the Oedipal narrative tradition by insisting that the deed of note is not only a woman’s but it is also perverse. On another level, Odysseus’ word-choice may be subversive for epic itself. It betrays a recognition that to commit a great deed is morally ambiguous and can result from foolishness. Odysseus manages to avoid mentioning Epicaste’s (infamous) big deed with her son (thereby preserving a suitable epic register);⁸⁰ but his language may also suggest some kind of moral failing.⁸¹

Connected to this strategy is the phrase ‘in the ignorance of her mind’ (αἰδρεῖησι νόοιο) with which Odysseus describes Epicaste’s ‘big deed’. While the phrase is a hapax in Homer, the lexical item (*aīdr-*) often marks foolishness that prevents homecoming directly. Thus Odysseus characterises Circe’s duping of his companions as a result of ignorance,⁸² in more general terms Odysseus reflects that whoever, because of ignorance, hears the Sirens and hears their song does not get home to wife and child.⁸³ Again, in the context of the post-martial world of epic poetry, such foolishness may have a direct link to ‘overreaching’; in the *Works and Days* Hesiod maligns men who go to sea in the spring as foolish: their love of money leads directly to evil and death.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Homer tends to suppress exotic or explicit sexuality throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and incest falls into this category. Odysseus’ suppression may have less to do with moral sensibility than with the narrative dynamics of the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* is intimately concerned with generational continuity, specifically the collection of the triple-generation of Grandfather, Father, and Son. (For the significance of this group in Homeric poetry, see Felson (2002)). The dissonance between Odysseus’ claim that the gods made Oedipus’ tale known among men and his own reluctance to elaborate may be a feature of the *Odyssey*’s general valorisation of Odysseus’ unbroken family line.

⁸¹ In Archaic Greek poetry there may be a conceptual connection between the suffering of *algea* and foolishness as implied by a passage from Hesiod’s *Works and Days* where the silver race of men has griefs (ἀλγεῖς ἔχοντες, 133) because of foolishness (ἄφραδις, 134); this foolishness, in turn, is defined as *hubris* (ὑβριν γὰρ ἀτάσθαλον, 134) and a refusal to carry out rites for the gods (οὐδ’ ἀθανάτους θεραπεύειν / ἤθελον οὐδ’ ἔρδειν μακάρων ἱεροῖς ἐπὶ βωμοῖς, 135-6). Cf. Solon fr. 4.5-8 for a similar connection between foolishness, hubristic behaviour and *algea*. Solon criticizes his leaders for their foolishness (ἄφραδιῃσιν, 5), a greed connected to a lack of justice (ἄδικος νόος, 7), and an arrogance (ὑβριος, 8) that results in great suffering (ἄλγεα πολλά, 8). For a discussion of this passage see Irwin (2005) 94-5 and 166-9 for its resonance with Hesiod.

⁸² As Eurylochus puts it, ‘They all followed her in their ignorance’ (οἱ δ’ ἅμα πάντες αἰδρεῖησιν ἔποντο, *Od.* 10.231, 257).

⁸³ ὅς τις αἰδρεῖη πελάσῃ καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούσῃ / Σειρήνας, τῷ δ’ οὐ τι γυνὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα / οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ γάνυνται, *Od.* 12.41-3.

⁸⁴ Hes. *Op.* 685.

Implicit, then, in the ascription of ignorance to Epicaste, the companions, and the man who approaches the Sirens unaware, is Odysseus' distinct status: he is wily, clever, and pointedly *not* unknowing: he is the 'man who knew the minds of men'; indeed, even in the *Iliad* Odysseus seems like a man who knew nothing, until he spoke.⁸⁵ The criterion of knowledge distinguishes Odysseus absolutely from Oedipus, the man who does not even know who his parents are. Again, this points to an immanent theme of the *Odyssey*, the recognition of parents and the reunion of families. As Telemachus famously declares at the beginning of the *Odyssey* 'no one ever *knows* his own father' (οὐ γὰρ πῶ τις ἐὼν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω, *Od.* 1.216). Of course, most men like Telemachus benefit from knowing their own mother at least, just not in the way Oedipus does.

2.3 Learning how to shadow-box: reading Odysseus' Oedipus

As we saw at the beginning of this paper, by using evidence from Hesiod the critic can place Odysseus' citation of Oedipus' suffering in and against a wider web of tales that told of a war—the war against Thebes—that ranked alongside the Trojan War in the oral traditions. Furthermore, fragmentary remains of that particular epic tradition, known to us as the *Thebaid*, testify to the power of Oedipus' curses against his sons/brothers, which brings the family—and the city—to ruin.⁸⁶ But, efforts to reconstruct that narrative are frustrated by the distorting lens through which we are invited to see Thebes in an Odyssean underworld, a distorting lens which comes to light through a resonant analysis of key phrases.

We learn very little about Oedipus and his pains in the *Odyssey*, and what we do contrasts negatively with the example provided by Odysseus. Unlike Odysseus, whose wandering is implicit in the narrative and explicit in his own statements,⁸⁷ Oedipus' suffering comes not from wandering but from his over-determined familial relations with his mother/wife. Such a relationship represents an inversion of what happens in Odysseus' tales where suffering precedes *nostos* and punishment is for those who prevent it. Oedipus' suffering, in the words (and world) of Odysseus has no resolution; rather, it embodies futility and a remarkable lack of accomplishment (either in war or in securing a *nostos*). Indeed, Oedipus' suffering as depicted by Odysseus is pointless: he can never return home. In spite of the resonating phrase 'he suffered many pains', then, Oedipus does not turn out to possess the sufficient quality as a suffering hero—at least not in comparison to Odysseus (or, for that matter, the suffering Achaeans of the Iliadic tradition). From the perspective of Epicaste's big deed, too, Oedipus does not gain the same exceptionality of action that others accrue elsewhere in the Homeric corpus. Thus,

⁸⁵ πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, *Od.* 1.3. His intelligence is set out paradoxically in the *Iliad* where Antenor describes him as looking like an ignorant man (ἄτρεϊ φωτὶ εἰκώς, *Il.* 3.219) who is lame and witless. It is through *speech* that Odysseus sets himself apart and wherein 'no other man could rival him' (οὐκ ἄν ἐπειτ' Ὀδυσῆϊ γ' ἐρίσσειε βροτὸς ἄλλος, *Il.* 3. 223).

⁸⁶ *Thebaid* fr. 2 B./D: a 'great evil fell upon Oedipus' spirit' (μέγα οἱ κακὸν ἔμπεσε θυμῷ); his curses 'didn't escape the notice of the gods' Erinyes' (θεῶν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν).

⁸⁷ ἢ γὰρ δίκη, ὁππότε πάτρης / ἥς ἀπέησιν ἀνὴρ τόσσον χρόνον ὅσσον ἐγὼ νῦν, / πολλὰ βροτῶν ἐπὶ ἄστε' ἀλώμενος, ἄλγεα πάσχων, *Hom. Od.* 19.168-70.

Oedipus is denied both the martial accomplishment of an Iliadic hero and the thematically prized suffering of an Odysseus.

At the level of narrative structure, the *Odyssey* tradition seems to be trivialising the Oedipus tale by subordinating it within the account of Odysseus' greater sufferings. At the microcosmic level of narrative dynamics, we see Odysseus manipulating the tale to match his: he appropriates a traditional tale (and narrative device—the catalogue form) and tells it in a persuasive way to convince Arete and Alcinous to help bring an end to his *algea*. At this point Odysseus is also suffering many pains, but, by getting home, he will ultimately overcome them: indeed, this very story will help him achieve that end.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it carries the implicit lesson of an incorrect homecoming: Odysseus articulates the fear that Penelope will sleep with a stranger—and look what happens when you do! And, yet, Odysseus *will* come back as a stranger; but beneath the disguise lies the legitimate king and—more importantly—the legitimate husband who will reclaim both his throne and wife.

Three additional features of resonant interplay support the interpretation of this passage as a multifaceted example of Homeric poetic rivalry. First, there is the issue of the gods' role in these affairs. Elsewhere in hexameter poetry the generation of epic narrative is connected to divine sanction. This process is most obvious with the poet's invocation to the muse; but Zeus' plan is also prominent at the beginning of the Homeric epics and, so far as we can tell, the *Cypria*.⁸⁹ It is noteworthy, therefore, that Odysseus' narrative of Thebes includes the description of Oedipus ruling 'through the baleful plans of the gods' (θεῶν ὀλοῶς διὰ βουλᾶς).⁹⁰ In this case the anonymity of the gods may reflect Odysseus' position as a human narrator, or else their plurality may suggest no single narrative line. Either way, it seems clear that Oedipus' heroic career suffers as a result of the gods' lack of support, which is, of course, what Odysseus counts on. In contrast Odysseus' narrative of his suffering is a clear indication that he now enjoys the gods' full support: the *Odyssey* in fact begins with Odysseus' fate being put on the agenda of the gods by Athena in the absence of his antagonist, Poseidon.⁹¹

Second, Odysseus notes that the gods made Oedipus' situation known to men immediately (ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν). Again, a contrast may be drawn with Odysseus' own situation and narrative. The adverb 'immediately' (ἄφαρ) contrasts with the gradual unwinding of (this) epic narrative, a process that is exemplified by the *Odyssey*'s concealment of the 'man' of the story for five books and by Odysseus' deferred disclosure of his name in the

⁸⁸ Not that Odysseus' pains are to end even with the end of the *Odyssey*: Teiresias foretells of still more wandering (and suffering) to come (*Od.* 11.121-37).

⁸⁹ *Hom. Il.* 1.5-6; *Cypria* fr. 1. See n.54 above.

⁹⁰ At *Iliad* 15.71, Zeus delivers his most detailed articulation of his plan yet, and ascribes it to 'the plans of Athena' (Ἀθηναίης διὰ βουλᾶς). Similar causative relationships are expressed through other phrasings (*Od.* 8.82—Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς—a phrase that interestingly appears in Demodocus' song about war). Cf. *Hes. Th.* 465 and 572. An interesting modification of this formula occurs also in *Od.* 11 when Odysseus commiserates with Agamemnon over his fate and blames 'feminine plans' (11.437: γυναικείας διὰ βουλᾶς).

⁹¹ See Clay (1983).

Phaeacian narrative.⁹² The adjective ‘notorious’ (ἀνάπυστα) in conjunction with the unspecified divine agency contrasts similarly with Odysseus’ tale: while Odysseus is, as we know, the subject of Homeric poetry he is also given the opportunity to be the agent of his own fame; Oedipus’ tale, although communicated here briefly by Odysseus, is not endowed with the language of epic poetry. Odysseus’ choice of diction, beyond depriving Oedipus of the trappings of epic song, may be generally perjorative.⁹³

More striking still is the identity of the group to whom the gods make known Oedipus’ calamity. Where one may have expected a name for Oedipus’ immediate group, such as his ‘people’ (*laos*) or ‘townspeople’ (*astoi*), both of whom, one might think, the gods ought to have told about Oedipus, Odysseus uses the word ‘mankind’ (*anthropoi*). As this translation suggests, the nomenclature of *anthropoi* frequently occurs in generalised expressions: for our purposes two instances are particularly telling. In the *Iliad* Helen uses this label as she comments on her place within the poetic tradition (*Il.* 6.388). Moreover, Odysseus uses the term at the beginning of his tale to the Phaeacians to assert that he is the subject of song among men because of his trickery (ὅς πᾶσι δόλοισιν / ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, *Od.* 9.19-20). Odysseus’ identification of this group as the recipients of the gods’ revelation, then, slyly gestures towards the broadcast of his rival’s narrative tradition, even as the *Odyssey* silences it.

That feature may also explain Odysseus’ description of Thebes as πολυήρατος. While this epithet occurs elsewhere in Homeric epic with the translation ‘much-loved’,⁹⁴ its presence here as an epithet for Thebes prompted an ancient commentator to search for an alternative meaning, since ‘much loved’ hardly seems appropriate to the Thebes of Oedipus and Epicaste. Instead, he interprets πολυήρατος as ‘much cursed’, thereby, it seems, importing knowledge of the Theban tradition into his explanation.⁹⁵ But, at another level, even, or

⁹² Slatkin (2005) 315-16. On Odysseus’ disguise and gradual self-disclosure: Murnaghan (1987).

⁹³ Other uses of the rare adjective *anapusta* may support this assertion. Sch. bT 11.274 glosses the adjective as meaning ‘to be spoken of and learned about through the mouths of everyone; or, manifest’. Herodotus, the only other author before the Roman empire who uses this adjective, appears to limit to situations where facts become known without any specifically noted agent. The information referred to using this adjective, furthermore, reflects badly on its subject: in book six *anapusta* refers to the Spartan king Demaratus’ suspect paternity (6.64.3) and the debasement of the Delphic oracle through Cleomenes’ bribery (6.66.10-12). Telling too is the use of this adjective in book 9 of the *Histories* where it describes Xerxes’ strange trouble: because he lusted after his brother Masistes’ daughter—whom he originally meant for his own son, an arrangement he made because he hoped to open an avenue towards a relationship with the girl’s mother—he ended up killing his brother, and his own wife arranged for the mutilation of Masistes’ wife. In all three of these cases, Herodotus uses the adjective to describe the revelation of unseemly information. Pausanias (9.5.11) takes issue with the fact that Homer records that Oedipus’ marriage to his mother became *anapusta*—he does not see how Epicaste could have then given birth to four children with Oedipus. The answer to this riddle, according to Pausanias, is that the four children actually were borne to Oedipus by his second wife Euryganeia. Cf. Pher. fr. 48 (= sch. Eur. *Phoen.* 53).

⁹⁴ Helen gives Telemachus a gift for his ‘much-loved’ wedding (*Od.* 15.126); Eumaeus talks about arriving at ‘much-loved’ youth (*Od.* 15.366); Odysseus talks about going to their ‘much-loved’ bed (*Od.* 23.354). Cf. Hes. *Th.* 404.

⁹⁵ See sch. BQV *Od.* 11.275 = sch. D (Ernst 2006). Cf. ἡρᾶτο, *Thebaid* fr. 2.

especially, in this context, Thebes may deserve the epithet πολυήρατος: its ruling family is much loved, excessively so, as the son marries his mother and begets his brothers and sisters. This is a family that could not be further removed from the perfect single male-line genealogy of the *Odyssey*. Moreover, as Odysseus puts it, while Oedipus ruled on in ‘much-loved Thebes’, his mother/wife descended into Hades (ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτω... / ἡ δ’ ἔβη εἰς Ἀΐδαο πυλάρταο). The metrical and syntactical correspondence between the two lines and two epithets πολυηράτω and πυλάρταο creates a jingling effect and draws a parallel between the two actions: Oedipus living on in Thebes, with no mention of his blinding, children or exile, effectively silences a tradition that could have told about his many pains. Instead, the *Odyssey* consigns the Theban tradition to Hades.⁹⁶

Thebes and Troy may have been equally important mythscapes for Archaic Greek poetry. We have lost much of the Theban tradition, but we have a multitude of instances where Homer appears to be incorporating details from Theban tales in his poems. Rather than view such moments as faithful reproductions, we have tried in this paper to show the value of examining such intersections through the prism of poetic rivalry. While such an approach need not be grounded in oral-formulaic theory, we believe that scholarship on oral poetry evokes a poetic realm that would better facilitate the deployment of these themes than our familiar literate paradigm.

We have argued that Odysseus constructs his version of Oedipus as a comparison for himself. By focussing on instances of *algea* and primary heroes, we suggest that not only is the accumulation of suffering a significant feature of a Homeric ‘hero’s’ story, but that this suffering acquires context-specific value. In the *Iliad* it is connected to martial achievement and the tragedy of Achilles’ fame. In the *Odyssey* it becomes the very thing that makes Odysseus’ *nostos* worth mentioning.

An analysis of Epicaste’s *mega ergon* confirms the extent to which Odysseus manipulates both the details of the Oedipal tale and the diction of epic poetry itself to magnify his own status. In Odysseus’ tale his suffering becomes the very standard against which all songs should be measured: suffering takes on moral meaning, which is—crucially—part of the ethical thrust of the *Odyssey* as a whole. This final analysis, we believe, is valuable because it points to Odysseus’ attempts to suppress, edit, or otherwise manipulate other poetic traditions in the service of his tale. Such a strategy, we believe, is akin to that which heroic epic poets would have taken when struggling in their effort to make their song of many pains the most bewitching and orderly.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ This expression, εἰς Ἀΐδαο πυλάρταο, resonates exactly with *Il.* 8.367 (according to Athena, when Heracles was sent into Hades, she had to help him) and *Il.* 13.415 (Deiphobus proclaims that he sends someone to accompany his dead comrade to Hades). More broadly, the image of going to Hades recalls the *Iliad*’s proem (*Il.* 1.3-4).

⁹⁷ See the ‘enchanted’ reaction of the Phaeacians (*Od.* 11.333-4 = 13.1-2), and Alcinous’ positive evaluations of Odysseus’ tales (*Od.* 11.363-76 and 13.4-15). The diction of Odysseus’

Singers in ‘traditional’ situations do not always slavishly repeat the songs they have heard—excellent singers manipulate the tensions inherent in a system of repetition and iteration to perform new songs that *sound old*. From the use of a single word to the abridgment or alteration of other tales, the oral poet challenges himself and his audience by reinterpreting their collective inheritance. Certainly, this is what Odysseus does when he sings of Oedipus’ pains. What the passage of time *and* the poetic strategies themselves have obscured for us, however, is how deeply Homer has done the same.

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‘enchantment’ is intriguing: κληθμός occurs only in these two passages in the *Odyssey*. Sch. BV *Od.* 11.334 glosses the noun as granting pleasure (*hêdonê*) and delight (*terpsis*). Cf. Eust. *Comm. ad Homeri Od.* I 422.28-34 for etymological speculations. The lexical item itself is rare in Archaic and Classical Greek, appearing in Plato’s *Republic* to describe snake-charming (358b3) and the type of pleasure that misleads men to change their opinions (413c2). On varieties of enchantment in the *Odyssey*, see Walsh (1984). On the assessment that Homeric poetry enchants, see the result of the *Certamen* (205), with Graziosi (2002) 172-82.

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⁹⁸ <http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2006/1831/>

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